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ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the political position occupied by a college laboratory school from 1965 to 1970. The school was located between the desegregated college and the segregated school system, both of which laid claims of control over the school. Existing in both contexts, the Marvin Pitman Laboratory School became a connection between competing political positions around the issue of school desegregation in Bulloch County (Georgia). Using a poststructural analysis of power based on the writing of Foucault, the study reports the results of an investigation into the manner in which power and resistance were and were not mobilized by individuals and institutions during the period. By 1969 the school had the highest rate of integration in the county and the first integrated faculty, both achieved without the support of either governing institution. Both bodies chose not to take advantage of the power linkage to advance an agenda of compliance or resistance to integration efforts. The unique role of the laboratory school ended with the intervention of the Federal government and forced integration in 1971, but it serves as a reminder that individuals, and not institutions, engage in the politics of resistance against structural and cultural norms they deem oppressive and wrong. (Contains 9 references.) (SLD)

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The Laboratory School as the Nexus of Power: Desegregation, the College, and the Public Schools, 1965-1970

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The Laboratory School as the Nexus of Power: Desegregation, the College, and the Public Schools, 1965-1970

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the political position occupied by a laboratory school from 1965 to 1970. That position was located between the desegregated college and the segregated public school system, both of which laid claims of control over the school. Existing simultaneously in both contexts, the laboratory school became one ostensibly important intersection between competing political positions around the issue of school integration.

Utilizing a poststructural analysis of power (Foucault, 1978), this study reports on the results of an investigation into the manner in which power/resistance was, and was not, mobilized by individuals and institutions during this sociohistorical juncture. This is a local history, combining archival research with oral documentation. An approach recommended by Foucault as one of the important ways to explore power "where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, there--that is to say--where it installs itself and produces real effects" (Foucault, 1980, p. 92).

Power/resistance is a co-present, relational force existing at all social intersections. It is a force present in all social relations, not a discrete entity to be overtly introduced or withdrawn in a linear sense by some individuals and not others.

Although the presence of power/resistance is a constant, its applications are not, given the need for conscious mobilization of its potentiality.

Therefore, the question to be raised is how power was, or was not mobilized within a particular social arrangement. How was power/resistance mediated through the arrangement itself by the individuals and institutions present at the sociohistorical juncture? The particular social arrangement examined in this work positions the laboratory school at a nexus in the power network existing between the local schools, the laboratory school, the college, and the federal judiciary. As such, the Marvin Pittman Laboratory School occupied a unique structural position during the desegregation era in Bulloch County, Georgia.

The student body of Marvin Pittman traditionally represented a select population of children, drawn largely by invitation, from the families of both college faculty and the local social elite. While allegedly "an integral part of the Georgia Southern College and the Bulloch County Public School System" (Marvin Pittman, 1969, p. 2), in reality the school operated more as a private institution, insulated from both the college and the county. Faculty were not expected to attend either college nor county meetings, and the operational parameters of the school were left primarily to the building principal and his staff.

This isolation provided a milieu wherein voluntary integration progressed in an environment relatively free of hostility. This is not to say the laboratory school, with

regards to integration, was used proactively by either the county or the college. Rather, the desegregation efforts at Marvin Pittman were carried through *in spite* of the laissez-faire attitude of the affiliate institutions. In fact, integration at the laboratory school was an articulation of resistance by a few individuals who chose to mobilize the power available to advance an agenda of social equality in a rural community in southeast Georgia.

Established in 1906 by the state legislature as an agricultural institution, Georgia Southern began as a small campus located on the outskirts of Statesboro, the governmental seat of Bulloch County. In 1924, the Georgia Normal School was established and charged with educating teachers to work in the isolated school systems of the surrounding rural counties. One of the first acts of the revised institution was to establish the Sunnyside School which educated students in grades 1 through 4. Four years later the Georgia Southern Laboratory School was instituted on the campus of what was soon to become Georgia Southern Teachers College.

By 1941, the laboratory school was enrolling over three hundred students in a 1-12 setting. Building additions and renovations in the 1950s allowed for a modest expansion of the student body, however the year prior to voluntary integration in 1965, Marvin Pittman was still the smallest of the three K-12 institutions in the segregated Bulloch County system.

Throughout its existence, the school did not necessarily draw the attention of educators outside the college nor did it gain even the regional recognition afforded other laboratory schools in Georgia. In fact, for over three decades the laboratory school on the Southern campus quietly went about the business of educating both youngsters and pre-service teachers in a conservative, selective environment.

In 1964, Bulloch County was operating a dual system of fifteen schools, five for African Americans and ten for European Americans. Following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the county initiated a voluntary desegregation program for the upcoming academic year. On June 3, 1969, the Justice Department filed a suit against the Bulloch schools charging violations of Section 407 (a) of the Civil Rights Act (U.S. v. Board of Education, 1969). After numerous hearings and political maneuvering by both sides, District Court Judge Alexander Lawrence found the positions of both the Justice Department and the Bulloch Schools unsatisfactory, and issued his own plan for integration to be implemented during the 1971-72 academic year. (United States v. Board of Education, 1970). This plan was successfully discharged under government scrutiny. Following the removal of federal observers however, the school system instituted county-wide tracking, and by 1973 had successfully re-segregated most students, this time by room rather than by

building.[1]

Against this backdrop, individuals worked both for and against full integration within the schools and the wider social community. A coalition of progressive educators, business leaders, clergy, and private individuals worked in various ways to advance integration through local organizations such as the NAACP and the interracial Human Relations Council. A member of the latter recalls their role during this effort.

> This group was very important. This was the council that kept down the violence. We placed the first Black bank tellers downtown, and the like; and we met every month and we had a great deal of dialogue. Many violent meetings with chairs up in the air, but this was the group that pressured the businesses to integrate and kept the protests from having to occur. You understand, of course, there were guns on the roof sometimes when we met. On our behalf.[2]

Simultaneously, members of the White community participated in public and clandestine organizations designed to resist the edicts of the government. Some business owners continued to refuse service to Blacks within their establishments (U.S. v. Boyd, 1971), other individuals participated in the local white

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[1]For a detailed account of the integration of the Bulloch County Schools, see Bryan Deever, "Desegregation in a Southern School System, 1968-1974: Power/resistance and the Discourse of Exclusion," Journal of Education, forthcoming.

[2]All interviews were conducted in 1993 under guarantees of anonymity.

citizens' council (Citizens for Better Government), some entered into projects to establish segregation academies, and a few went underground with the Ku Klux Klan. Against this backdrop, the Marvin Pittman Laboratory School quietly enrolled its first minority students in the fall of 1965, six years before the effective integration of the Bulloch County Schools.

The Marvin Pittman faculty enjoyed an elevated position both in terms of status and economy within the ranks of the county education workers. While being among the few individuals in the school system to hold advanced degrees, the Marvin Pittman workers were also paid a stipend by the college in addition to their county pay. In an interview, a former Pittman faculty member recalls being resented by the county staff who viewed the school with some disdain as serving "only the best while we have to struggle with the rest." This was articulated throughout the county administrative structure as the central office enunciated a position of relative indifference to the existence of the school.

Simultaneously, the college, as a unit of governance, exercised very little overt control over the school's daily operations. With the exception of specific individuals in the division of education who worked closely with the faculty and staff of the laboratory school in the preparation of pre-service teachers, there was little acknowledgement of either the existence or the importance of the school in the ongoing

desegregation debate of the mid-1960s.

This is an important point of which to take note. While the college had achieved just under 1.5 percent integration by 1969 (Georgia Southern, 1982, p. 80), the county schools had reached only 2.9% integration of the traditional White schools and zero integration of the traditional Black schools (U.S. v. Board of Education, 1970); this in a county with a forty percent minority population. The college publicly articulated the desire to generate a steady increase in the percentage of student integration, and did take *proactive* steps toward that end (Georgia Southern, 1982, pp. 78-83). The public schools, however, occupied a *reactive* position of resistance to the federal government utilizing alternative forms of school choice in an attempt to meet the letter of the law while bypassing its intent (U.S. v. Board of Education, 1970).

At that historical juncture, Marvin Pittman had achieved the highest rate of integration in the county with nearly 5.5% (U.S. v. Board of Education, 1970), and in the 1969 academic year had deployed the first integrated faculty; something neither the college nor the public schools had yet attempted (Personnel Records, 1969-72). This rate of relative success was not achieved with the support of either governing institution. Both bodies, in fact, chose not to take advantage of the power linkage between themselves and the lab school to advance either an agenda of compliance or resistance to integration efforts within the educational community.

The public schools might have used the laboratory school to argue for the obvious success of voluntary integration and relief from federal compulsion. They might also have chosen to utilize the lab school as a model for the rest of the county to mitigate the irrational fears surrounding desegregation. The county, however, failed to do so primarily due to the perception of the lab school as a facility separated from the balance of the public schools. This is confirmed by the words of a former central office official.

> The laboratory school was primarily in the hands of the college as far as we were concerned. They received some funding from us and had to adhere to certain state and county regulations, and we did count their test scores in the county averages [pause] but they were pretty much on their own over there.

The college, on the other hand, while articulating a desire to achieve integration, also failed to take advantage of the lab school as a part of the power network. While the administration might have utilized the laboratory school to pressure the local schools to accept full integration, they did not. In fact, the efforts at Marvin Pittman went largely unacknowledged by the administrative unit of Georgia Southern College. A ranking member of the college faculty who directed field experiences during that era recalls the rather quiet manner in which integration at Pittman took place.

Q. You're saying the college really didn't put any

pressure on Marvin Pittman to integrate?

A. No, one day they [minority students] just showed up one morning. . . . If they [the college administration] talked about it, they did it in secret. I'm sure it was discussed, but I was not in on any of the discussions and I was in on everything that was happening.

As a result, the college chose not to mobilize the pathways of power which led through Marvin Pittman to the local school system.

Whence, then, came the impetus for integration and who engaged in the politics of resistance against local segregation? The answer was to be found within the constituent body of education workers at the Marvin Pittman Laboratory School. It must be made clear, however, that the agenda of integration was not shared by all the Pittman faculty. In fact, there were some who sent their own children immediately to the segregation academy in 1971 when the local school system was fully integrated. Others chose to exit that setting by retiring from the school. But those who did share in the vision of social and educational equality found a site wherein they might pursue their project with a strong possibility of success. The manner in which the integration of the student body and the faculty proceeded, true to the historical nature of the school, was conservative, deliberate, and relatively steady.

When Bulloch County enacted the 1965 plan for voluntary desegregation in an attempt to forestall forced integration,

individuals at Marvin Pittman took that opportunity to recruit a select group of students to enter the all-White facility. Through social networking, it was determined that specific families from the Black community would participate in the desegregation efforts. Academic success was perceived as the key to the regional argument against integration (Stell v. Savannah-Chatham, 1964), and solicitation of academically apt students was seen as the best response. In addition, an effort was made to recruit these students from the families understood to be leaders within that cultural community.

The current principal of the laboratory school recalls the tactics of the initial selection process.

> There was a hands-off approach [to integration] as it relates to the college. When I got here, there were about five [minority] students. In my opinion, they were kind of hand picked. I know two of those students were children of the principal at the [Black] high school, William James, at that time. And I'm not necessarily being negative, but I think you want people who feel good about themselves, otherwise they don't fit into this [integrated] setting.

The number of Black students enrolling at Marvin Pittman increased steadily for the next five years: from five students in 1965-66 to fifty two in 1970-71. Although this number is only one third of the number of minority students assigned to Pittman after forced integration, it still represents a significantly high percentage when viewed relative to both the county schools

and the college. Clearly, the education workers at Marvin Pittman were in the forefront in the years 1965 through 1970 with their efforts to desegregate the educational system of Bulloch County.

The integration of the Marvin Pittman faculty was accomplished in the same deliberate, selective manner. Prior to the 1969 academic year, Agnes Young was a member of the teaching staff at the segregated Willow Hill Elementary School (Personnel Records, 1968-1969). Recommended by a former colleague, Ms. Young was approached about joining the faculty at Pittman by Julian Pafford, principal of the lab school. She agreed, and became the first individual to integrate the full time faculty of the any of the three institutions (Personnel Records, 1969-72). The recollections of a former Marvin Pittman faculty member speaks to the internal impetus and personal networking which brought about that first faculty integration.

> The atmosphere at this school was similar to that of a private school. But I felt that Mr. Pafford, and probably the faculty, felt a need--not a pressure--but a need to begin to integrate. . . . Because apparently he [Pafford] had sort of put the word out amongst some of [pause] he said, like, "Mrs Waller [an education professor], if there's a good person in your class who may work with that situation, then bring that person to my attention." Mrs. Waller did, and that first year, if he was working because

> of pressure or tokenism, chances are he would not have put forth an effort to get a second person and then been amenable to even getting more than one person that first year. And, of course, we had a third person the next year.

Ms. Young's qualifications included not only her outstanding record of service over the past thirteen years, but also the fact that she was one of the few faculty in the county who held a master's degree. With these credentials, her entry onto the Pittman staff was largely defensible, although it did violate existing Georgia regulations about integrated faculty assignments.

The following year, two more African Americans joined the Pittman staff: Lois Dotson and Johnny Tremble. Dotson was a veteran teacher employed in the newly integrated Savannah-Chatham County system, and Tremble was a recent M.Ed. graduate of Georgia Southern who had worked at Pittman as part of his assistantship, and was then working in the Effingham County system. Both of these individuals came to Pittman through the efforts of faculty in the college division of education.

The Georgia Southern faculty member who first identified and approached Lois Dotson about the possibility of her joining the Statesboro staff, recounts the experience.

> Lois Dotson. I had her in a graduate course in Savannah and discovered her, there. And they asked me to find a second teacher who could come in there [Pittman] and not be intimidated, and Lois created some real waves. . . she was

something.

Dotson, a veteran education worker, joined the Pittman faculty apparently capable of dealing with the latent feelings of animosity among some of the staff. In one instance, when a White colleague complained in the staff room that her "colored maid was sick again, and the housework was piling up," Dotson replied without hesitation, "Don't you just hate that, my White maid is the same way."

Dotson's impact was also felt among her students, one of whom recounted the following.

> I credit Mrs. Dotson on my lack of prejudice. She was the first Black I was ever around every day, and she treated all of us just the same way. I remember she used to tell us about the Black history and the like right along with our other studies. She made a big impact on my life, that's for sure.

Lois Dotson remained a vibrant member of the Marvin Pittman faculty until she retired in 1974. At a dinner which, as one colleague recalled, "ran far into the night with Lois presiding like a queen over her court," hundreds of colleagues, friends, and former students gathered in her honor. Two days later, Lois Dotson died of a massive stroke.

Johnny Tremble was a native of Bulloch County and had attended and taught in the segregated public schools. Tremble worked as a graduate assistant at Pittman in 1968 and was instrumental in identifying Agnes Young as an ideal individual

for the school. Although principal Pafford hoped to add both Young and Tremble to the Pittman faculty, there were no positions available in his area during the 1969-70 academic year, and he went to a neighboring county to teach at a recently integrated elementary school. In 1970, Tremble returned as a full time faculty member along with Dotson and Young and, at the time of this study, is employed as the principal of the Marvin Pittman Laboratory School at Georgia Southern University.

In terms of this study, the unique role of the laboratory school ended with the intervention of the federal government and the forced integration of the public schools in 1971. The Bulloch County schools had lost their fight to maintain de facto segregation and had complied with the orders of the court. At that time, Marvin Pittman curtailed its unique selective admissions policy and began admitting students on the basis of federally mandated guidelines. Between the 1970 and the 1971 academic years, minority student representation at Pittman jumped from sixteen to forty percent, and the number of minority faculty increased by twenty-five percent (Personnel Records, 1969-72).

The laboratory school was a nexus within the power network wherein conflicting politics were mediated. Within this nexus resided the possibility for the mobilization of power/resistance in order to break the hold of segregation and educational inequality. Through this study we have witnessed the articulation of power/resistance by select individuals, and the

refusal of affiliate institutions to mobilize that same potential. In the end, it is evident that it is individuals, not institutions who engage in the politics of resistance against those structural and cultural norms which they deem oppressive and wrong. We would do well to remember the tenacity and courage of these individuals and to record their struggle in order to illuminate that power/resistance is a force which can and should be mobilized by those with a vision of a better, and more equitable, world.

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